DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 276 286 FL 016 252

AUTHOR Coulmas, Florian
TITLE Why Linguists Should Deal with "Good Language" and "Bad Language."
PUB DATE Jun 85
NOTE 32p.; Paper presented at a Conference on Vernacular Languages for Modern Societies (Bad Homburg, West Germany, June 11-15, 1985).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Diachronic Linguistics; Diglossia; *Language Attitudes; *Language Maintenance; *Language Planning; *Language Role; Linguistic Borrowing; *Quality Control; Sociolinguistics; Standards; *Written Language

ABSTRACT

Linguists generally refuse to make judgments about language or define standards of excellence for it. This perpetuates a fundamental paradox of descriptive linguistics: the inability to describe a language without providing a standard or setting a norm. The discipline's desire to escape from ethnocentrism has caused it to avoid a legitimate and desirable function: evaluating languages according to their suitability for different forms of communication. The speech community expects linguistic judgments from linguists. Just as Latin was consciously shaped into a learned language, other languages can and should be cultivated to serve new communicative needs. Written language has a crucial role in this process, but the precise role is a major challenge for linguists. However, the process of cultivation should not be confused with purification, which is ideological and does not consider the complexity or sophistication of language. In a world where technological innovation is rapid and quickly trickles down to the nonspecialist public, deliberate language cultivation is more necessary than ever. (MSE)

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Florian Coulmas

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Why Linguists Should Deal with "Good Language" and "Bad Language"

Florian Coulmas

> Die Schöpfung einer einheitlichen Schriftsprache ist eine Kulturtat ersten Ranges. (O. Behaghel 1907)

Two points of view concerning conscious intervention in linguistic development

Language is essentially a social phenomenon. No linguist would deny this, yet the social character of language poses a difficult problem for linguistics as a science. Natural language is the key word of twentieth century linguistics, and despite the enormous expansion and advances of Sociolinguistics in the last quater century, the scholar who investigates language from either a partly structural (synchronic) or quasi-Darwinian (diachronic) perspective as a natural phenomenon is widely regarded - and regards himself - as the true keeper of the Holy Grail of scientific rigor in linguistics. Even though he admits that language does not exist but in, and through, a speech community, he insists on studying it from the Olympian point of view of the unbiassed observer. Most of all he refuses to get involved and make judgements or define standards of excellence. Yet, this noble attitude does not get him off the prescriptive hook, because the fundamental paradox of descriptive linguistics--that is, the inability of describing a language without providing a standard or setting a norm--is yet to be solved.

The prescriptive abstinence of linguists is a recent phenomenon; a result, one tends to think, of the overall

positivist trend in the social sciences in this century. Linguists were much concerned with establishing their scientific credentials and thus tried to liberate themselves from a tradition where the grammarians were always also the norm makers.[1] They discovered what John Lyons called the 'classical fallacy' as an example of scientific self-assurance and the attempt to define a new beginning for the study of language. The 'classical fallacy' was already committed by Alexandrinian linguists. It was

> "the assumption that the language of the fifth-century Attic writers was more 'correct' than the colloquial speech of their own time; and in general that the 'purity' of a language is maintained by the usage of the educated, and 'corrupted' by the illiterate. For more than two thousand years this prejudice was to reign unchallenged" (Lyons 1968: 9).

And it is still upheld by virtually all people who had no linguistic training. Laymen need not really be concerned about this, but for linguists this misconception, this fallacious view about language is a real problem. For the past two thousand years, Lyons tells us, they did not do what they were supposed to do, because they fell prey to the 'classical fallacy' that some linguistic usages are superior to others. There is no reason to dispair, however, because now that the fallacy has been recognized as such, most linguists would say that it is absurd to talk about languages changing for the better or the worse.[2] They change, and that is all.

There are two versions of this point of view: One is that language change can be influenced as much as the development of

terrestrial climate can. There is really no point in trying to do it. The other is that the very attempt to excercise an influence on language is unscientific and hence not what linguists are being paid for. Whether we can or cannot influence language change is unimportant, we shouldn´t do it. The metaphor of language as an organism has influenced the notion of what a language is so strongly that any attempt at influencing its natural development is morally as dubious as cloning. Most linguists have gladly adopted either the ´cannot´ or the ´should not´ position, and by declaring themselves incompetent in matters of "good" or "bad" language have relieved themselves from the responsibility of possible consequences of their own work.

The scholars´ serene detachment from the object of their studies is, however, in sharp conflict with the expectations of the speech community. What is a linguist good for who cannot give advice about good or bad language? And who refuses to make statements about what is good for our languages? Who else would be more qualified to make such statements? At school students are taught their own mother tongue for ten years or more, but what happens after that? Most school teachers are still willing to tell which is right and which is wrong, but the professional linguist, the authority at the top, is much more reluctant, nowadays. Generally, linguists have failed to appreciate the effects of generations of schooling on the development of language.

Sociologically the linguists' reluctance to proscribe usage is very interesting, because their authority was never challenged from "below" by the speech community who rebelled against arbitrary norms, but rather they abandoned it voluntarily in the name of truth and scientific advance. What we have here, then, are two conflicting view points about language and linguistics: the modern linguists' who try to free themselves from their predecessors' traditional role as "language makers," as Harris (1980) somewhat ironically calls them, on the one hand, and the authoritarian public who were brought up to rely on specialists in all matters of importance and thus want to rely on the language specialist in linguistic matters, on the other hand. Most laymen, after all, think of prescriptive grammars as the only possible kind. The subtle difference between discovering and imposing structures is quite beyond their interest.

In the long run the linguist will surely be proven right. Neither Cicero nor Priscian could have averted the decline of Latin and its splitting up into several plebeian languages, and it would be preposterous to assume that linguists today could do better, or would it not? In any event, the professional refusal to take a stand about 'right' and 'wrong' or 'good' and 'bad' by the linguist is unsatisfactory, because he abandons his field of expertise allowing all sorts of charlatans to rampage in it, shamans, as Bolinger (1980) calls them. Moreover, linguists today are in a better position than Cicero or Priscian, because they can enlist the support of institutions that can reach practically

the entire speech community, while the effects of systematic education were restricted to a small part of the speech community in classical times.

In societies with highly institutionalized infrastructures the public will not accept that 'anything goes' in language and that they themselves are the ones who decide about good and bad. Law makers and judges have to make decisions about good and bad in juridical terms, and this is generally seen as an improvement in society's conduct of affairs, even though arbitrary regulations cannot always be avoided. Why then should not the removal of linguistic anarchy also be regarded as a step forward?

Linguists, of course, have been arguing for some time that the only reason why certain usages are considered 'correct' by traditional grammars and textbooks is that they have been adopted by a privileged social class in the past.[3] To a certain extent they are right, but what some of them fail to notice is that the reason why they are considered correct are much less important than that they are so considered. The fact that a norm is established in a speech community means that there is no immediate need for the grammarian to crack the whip, but that the speakers adhere to it, even if they don't follow it in their own performance. This is demonstrated, maybe most impressively, by diglossic speech communities.

Why diglossic situations are perpetuated is one of the most puzzling questions of sociolinguistics. The fact is that they are perpetuated without pressure from the socially dominant, and

sometimes even against conscious attempts directed at abolishing the linguistic cleavage. What De Silva writes about Tamil diglossia may illustrate the point:

> "The diglossic character has...not been affected by the state´s [Tamil-Nadu, F.C.] political changes, and the high variety is still looked up to with the same respect and awe....Even the uneducated people would not take people seriously when they attempt to address them in public using the colloquial language known to the audience" (De Silva 1976: 51f.).

Diglossia is the linguistic sediment of certain socio-historical conditions, to be sure. Being aware of these conditions, however, does not necessarily affect the situation. To be more explicit, to know that certain linguistic norms stem from social privileges and from using language as a socially dividing rather than unifying force does not necessarily diminish their potency. No matter where a norm comes from, once it is there, it is a sociolinguistic fact and an effective factor of linguistic development.

De Saussure, it is well-known, was one of the godfathers of the notion of ´natural language´ as it came to be understood in modern linguistics. However, a historical linguist by training, he was still aware of its precariousness, which nowadays is often covered with the veil of ´necessary abstraction.´

> "Est-il possible de distinguer le développement naturel, organique d´un idiome, de ses formes artificielles, telles que la langue littéraire, qui sont dues à des facteures externes, par conséquent inorganiques?" (Saussure 1972: 42)

Grammarians have done little to meet the challenge of this question and determine which is and which isn´t natural in a

language.[4] But one thing is clear: Every sociolinguistic explanation of linguistic change has to reckon with the factor of language attitude which is at the interface of the organic and the artificial combining, as it does, elements of Sprachgefühl and social prestige. Speakers do have feelings about their idiome which may be a powerful determinant of linguistic change, and which may be influenced consciously by political intervention. For this reason, linguists should not just step back and allow their language to develop "naturally," waiving their right to make their opinion known in this matter and leaving a vacuum to be filled by others less competent to make a judgment.

Cultivated language

One of the axioms of modern linguistics is that all languages are equal. To leave no doubt about it, in principle this is a good axiom and a decisive advance over the times of even Bloomfield and Sapir when unwritten languages were commonly called "dialects," and "primitive language" was an inoffensive expression among linguists. It is also an advance over ideological statements as to the special beauty, power, richness, purity, etc. of a given language so common among nationalists in the nineteenth century.[5] After all, the equality of all languages with respect to their potential was not generally recognized until quite recently. Bloomfield, in his article Literate and illiterate speech of 1927, still felt the need to convince his readers that unwritten languages, too, were languages proper and

not merely unintelligible gibberish, and he is to be commended for making it clear that a literary tradition is not a good criterion for distinguishing between language and dialect. Nineteenth century European ethnocentrism did not spare linguistics. As a representative example consider the following unabashed remark by such an enlightened spirit as Wilhelm von Humboldt:

> "Daß Nationen von glücklicheren Gaben und unter günstigeren Umständen vorzüglichere Sprachen, als andere, besitzen, liegt in der Natur der Sache selbst" (Humboldt 1830-35: 20).[6]

There are no two ways about it, some nations have better languages than others, and that modern linguistics has done away with good and not so good languages is an unquestionable improvement.

However, the desire to part with its ethnocentric past has led the main stream of linguistics into an egalitarian relativism,[7] blocking the view on other than grammatical differences between languages, differences, that is, as to how the potential of a language is functionally exploited, or, to put it into economic terms, differences as to the relative productivity of languages. Insisting on the superiority of some (Western) languages is one thing, but evaluating a given language at a given historical state with respect to its relative suitability for certain forms of communication is another. There is nothing degrading in saying that, at present, Zulu, a South African Bantu language, is not a suitable medium for scientific writing in nuclear physics (Louw 1983). This is hardly

surprising, because so far nobody ever wanted to write about nuclear physics in Zulu, and the attributes that make a language fit as a medium for nuclear physics are not what languages are naturally endowed with. Unless there is a functional requirement, the functional potential will not develop.

A hundred years ago, the Japanese language was not fit to express scientific and social ideas of Western culture (Ono 1980). Today it is, but it is not a better language for that. It has been adapted to the needs of modern communication, partly by conscious effort, and now serves its speech community as an adequate means for all communicative purposes. Kindaichi, whose career as a linguist unfolded unperturbed by the sudden discovery of the 'classical fallacy,' writes about this achievement:

> "How should we evaluate the Japanese language?...Japanese does have various defects, but it is also true that we can say and write whatever we think in Japanese. Fortunately, we can use it to write scientific theses and business papers..." (Kindaichi 1957: 223).

This is the result not of natural development but of cooperative reactions to pressing language problems. In the 1870s and 80s Japanese was regarded by many Japanese intellectuals as so poorely equipped for meeting the demands of modernity that they even toyed with the idea of replacing it by a Western language. In 1873, Mori Arinori, a leading intellectual of his days who commanded tremendous prestige within the Japanese society, thus wrote a letter to American linguist William Whitney, soliciting his view of whether or not introducing an new national language for Japan was advisable and feasible:

> "The march of civilization in Japan has already reached the heart of the nation - the English language following it suppresses the use of both Chinese and Japanese. The commercial power of the English speaking race which now rules the world drives our people into some knowledge of their commercial ways and habits. The absolute necessity of mastering the English language is thus forced upon us. It is a requisite of our independence in the community of nations. Under the circumstances, our meager language, which can never be of any use outside our islands, is doomed to yield to the domination of the English tongue, especially when the power of steam and electricity shall have pervaded the land. Our intelligent race, eager in the pursuit of knowledge, cannot depend on a weak and uncertain medium of communication in its endeavor to grasp the principal truths from the precious treasury of Western science and art and religion. The laws of state can never be preserved in the language of Japan. All reasons suggest its disuse" (Mori 1973: I, vi).

Nowadays it is hard to believe that such a suggestion was ever seriously discussed by serious people; but a hundred years ago Japanese intellectuals were intensely worried about the linguistic future of their country. Westernization in Japan was so rapid that for some time, Japanese seemed inadequate for many purposes of communication. Fukuzawa Yukichi, the founder of Japan's first private university, in 1874, for instance, observed:

> "Up to now, there has been the fear that it is awkward to give a speech in Japanese, and that therefore a speech connot take a respectable form. However, after careful thought, I have come to the conclusion that there is no reason why a speech cannot be given in the Japanese language" (Fukuzawa 1874/1932: 206).

And further:

> "You may meet anyone in Japan, and you will never find a man who can express clearly everything he means" (op. cit. 207).

Such was the perception of the Japanese language then, which makes Mori's suggestion a little less bizarre.

On this background it is not so surprising that, some eighty years later, Kindaichi, with some relief, makes a point of saying that "it would be neither possible nor advisable to abandon this language" (Kindaichi 1957: 223). To him it is a matter of course that a language is not only a natural object but also a cultural asset worthy of thoughtful attention.

> "On the one hand, a language is a natural development, but on the other, something created. Even German, which is said to be a model of systematic languages, is a creation of the German people over a period of several generations. We who are living at the present time cannot help feeling a heavy responsibility for the future of the Japanese language" (Kindaichi 1957: 224).

What Kindaichi says about German is, of course, quite correct. As late as the turn of the 17th century German had a reputation as a boorish language unfit for educated discourse. Leibniz diagnosed a specific defect in terminology[8]:

> "Am allermeisten aber ist unser Mangel, wie gedacht, by denen Worten zu spüren, die sich auff das Sitten-Wesen, Leidenschaften des Gemüths, gemeinlichen Wandel, Regierungs-Sachen, und allerhand bürgerliche Lebens- und Staats-Geschäfte ziehen" (Leibniz 1697/1916: 29).[9]

In the same essay Leibniz proposed that an institution be created for the "improvement, decoration, and investigation of the German language." Political disunity in Germany did not allow for a national institution of this sort, but in the wake of Leibniz' proposal normative grammar came to the fore nevertheless. German had to compete with French which was still the preferred language of the political élite in the eighteenth century, but the intellectuals were already determined to use German as the medium of education and culture. Nothing like the

Accademia della Crusca or the Academie Française ever came into existence, but a number of bourgeois grammarians like J. Bödiker (1690), J. Ch. Gottsched (1748) and J. C. Adelung (1774) as well as poets like Klopstock, Herder and others pursued the common goal of turning German into a cultivated language by using it for all higher forms of writing and by pleading for its acceptance by the élites. Their contribution to cultivating the German language was very significant indeed.

It is interesting to note in this connection that in the absence of a single prestige model, such as that of the language of the royal courts in Paris and London, the standardization of German was mediated to a much higher degree than that of French or English by writing (Polenz 1983: 28). Despite Luther's famous maxim of dem Volk aufs Maul schaun--that is, to take the vernacular as a model for the written language--the emerging standard was heavily biassed by the stiff style of the chanceries whose grammatical conventions were partly shaped on Latin paradigms. Thus German, somewhat later than French and English, became a cultivated language whose literature gained international recognition in the eighteenth century. (In government, however, it took such drastic measures as the Napoleonic wars to replace French by German.) Ever since, German is free of all functional restrictions serving as the means of expression in all social domains of developed communication, such as, culture, technology, science, and government.

This is what the notion of 'cultivated language' means. In the sense in which it is used here it was first introduced in Grace (1981). Grace makes a distinction between "cultivated language" and "ordinary language," which is based on differences in language consciousness. Language is not perceived and experienced in the same way by all people at all times. Those 'natural' languages that have become objects of conscious attention on the part of their speakers are called "cultivated languages" by Grace (1981:3). Conscious attention to matters linguistic is not restricted to neutral observation, but rather implies that the language in question, or certain forms of them, are being shaped consciously by deliberate intervention. Learned Latin is a pertinent example.

Between 550 and 700 A. D., Latin ceased to be a natural language, that is, a native language. It continued to be widely used in the world of learning and was hence of great importance to the development of advanced thought throughout the European middle ages. But it was nobody's mother tongue, as it became converted into a "chirographically controlled language" (Ong 1977: 27). Other learned languages, such as, Sanskrit and Classical Arabic,or Kanbun, that is, written Japanese[10] had a similar fate being reduced to writing in the literal sense. Not being native languages anymore, nobody could claim authentic intuitions about their natural feel and development anymore. Thus the classical models of generally acclaimed written documents became ever more important. The learned languages did not only

use writing, they were subdued by writing. The acquisition of these languages without baby talk became a matter of pen and ink; they were consciously learned while sitting on a school bench rather than on mother's lap. The written standard was the only guide for correct usage which was a great merit of the learned languages for a long time. Not being subject to regional variation they functioned as universal media of intellectual exchange in widely separated parts of the world. That was an advantage at times of intellectual consolidation and relatively slow development. But eventually the lack of native speakers proved fatal. Stability turned into inflexibility, the reliable norm into an ossified artefact incapable of innovation and adaptation. The existence of Latin depended on the written medium exclusively. It lacked the dynamics of oral tradition from one generation to the next characteristic of every native language. In the Renaissance Latin had become a cultivated language only and lost the ability to change in accordance with the accelerated development of communicative needs in science, technology and government. The written conservation of a standard thus led to atrophy.

Two Arguments about Writing and Language

The cultivation of Latin to a learned language would have been unthinkable without writing. This is not to say that the notions of cultivated language and written language are interchangeable, but it is not a farfetched assumption that

writing plays an important role in language cultivation.[11] Determining the exact nature of this role is a major challenge for linguistics. By way of approaching this question two arguments concerning the relation of writing and language may serve as a vantage point. One is presented by Bloomfield in his above quoted article; the other is by Silvestre de Sacy, an important orientalist in early nineteenth century Paris. His argument is laid out in a letter to Thomas Young of 1816. It can be summarized as follows:

1. Writing is the sole fixative agent of language.

2. Languages can, therefore, be divided into different classes according to their writing systems.

3. There are three classes of languages:

   Scriptless, or barbarous, languages are in a state of permanent flux (which is why there are so many of them).

   Hieroglyphic languages (Egyptian and Chinese) have a stable vocabulary, but lack permanent grammar.

   Phonetically written languages, like Greek and Latin, combine the stability of writing with the flexibility of speech (which is why they could be cultivated to utmost refinement).

In short, writing is all important, it influences the very nature of language.

Bloomfield's argument, not surprisingly, points in the opposite direction. It can be summarized as follows:

1. The popular explanation of incorrect language in Western societies is guided by the standard of the written language.

2. The Menomini Indians distinguish between good and bad language, although they have no writing. Good language for the Menominis is the speech of some model speakers.

3. Ergo writing does not really make a difference.

According to Saussure, the object of linguistics is not given but defined by the linguist. What this means is amply demonstrated by the above arguments. From a contemporary point of view both appear rather hyperbolic. For Sacy writing defined the nature of language. Today the very notion of a "hieroglyphic language" seems rediculous. For Bloomfield, on the other hand, writing had an ancilliary function at best. "Writing," says he, "is based on speech, not speech on writing" (Bloomfield 1927: 433). While this is true historically, the relationship between speech and writing has changed with literacy and the prestige commanded by writing.

Bloomfield was right to point out that certain features of linguistic consciousness can be observed in unwritten as well as in written languages, but his allegation that writing makes no difference at all was overstating the case. Writing does not make as much of a difference as Sacy took for granted, in particular its association with a language does not justify a distinction between civilized and barbarous languages. However, we need not adopt his outmoded notions to recognize that writing may have far-reaching consequences for the development of a language. Moreover, we may seriously pursue the question of whether and how different writing systems affect languages differently. (There is no spelling pronunciation in Chinese, yet the Chinese language has been deeply influenced by its writing.)

Ferguson (1962) suggested four levels of written communication: (1) no writing, (2) writing for personal communication and literature, (3) writing on natural sciences, (4) writing for translating scientific texts from other languages. This classification is useful for certain purposes, but it does not distinguish languages with respect to their regimentation by writing. Writing is instrumental in language cultivation and regularization, which is not the same as language planning, but language planning too would be inconceivable without writing. Linguistic conventions become objectified in writing and can be maintained by a codified standard. However, the weightiness of the written form(s) of a language for the speech community at large and, by consequence, for the development of its language varies greatly from case to case.

If languages were to be ordered along a scale of relative import of writing, learned Latin would be positioned at one end and, for example, Cameroon Pidgin at the other. Latin exists as a written language only. Its soul is enshrined in the letter. Cameroon Pidgin, by contrast, is not used in writing. Moreover,no efforts are made to cultivate it, because it enjoys littel prestige although it is very practical in a multilingual country like Cameroon and despite the government´s French-English bilingual education policy still serves as an important link language between different regions, social classes and age groups (Todd 1984: 88ff.). Like Latin it is nobody´s mother tongue, but while Latin is a sacrosanct literary language whose classical

texts are respected like the letter of the law, Cameroon Pidgin is like an outlawed bastard whom nobody respects and everybody feels free to treat as he pleases. In between these two extremes of a language in the Procrustean bed of writing that stifles every deviation and hence innovation, on the one hand, and the uncontrolled promiscuity of a language answering every ad hoc communicative need by bending or expanding the rules, on the other hand, there are various degrees of flexibility, regularization, and conformity of the spoken language with a written standard which, in historical terms, can be seen as either linguistic convergence (of the spoken with the written form) or divergence. The modern European standard languages are the result of convergence. Diglossic languages, such as, Tamil, Singhalese or Arabic are a result of divergence. Both cases can be defined in terms of writing, written norm, and literacy.

Writing is not the only factor in language cultivation. As for example the history of Vedic civilization teaches us, language cultivation can go a long way without writing. However, if writing is, maybe, not a necessary condition of language cultivation, it surely is an important intervention in the history of any language that acquires a written form, especially in deliberately steering its adaptation to novel communicative needs or ideological purposes.

Language cultivation requires certain language attitudes, such as, the willingness of an élite to use language as a means of social control and unification, and as a barrier to outsiders

and symbol of national identity. Thus language cultivation is likely to become, and often has become, a political issue. Whenever this happens, there is a good chance that other than reasonable criteria come to bear on attempts at influencing linguistic development. This is, I believe, a major reason why linguists should not abstain, under the pretext of anti-normativism, from dealing with "good language" and "bad language." Linguists have no monopoly on shaping a language--in as far as it can be shaped--but they are better qualified than others to distinguish between linguistic and non-linguistic matters and make judgments that are not emotionally and ideologically biassed.

Our language is going down the drain

Language is often instrumentalized for purposes of political socialization (cf. Coulmas 1985). To a greater or lesser extent, the representatives of states or nations feel an obligation to imbue their citizenry with a respect for their culture of which language is seen to be a part. Among the most common ideologemes exerted in this connection is the authenticity maxim: Our heritage is authentic and therefore good.[12] Its correlate, of course, is xenophobia: The alien is bad. When applied to language, linguistic purification results. Loan words are perceived as contaminating the purity of the language, which in turn is regarded as a threat to cultural identity. Once such an

idea gains public recognition, a purification movement is born, and this is the other side of the coin of language cultivation.

An interesting case is that of the purification of German which was gradually cleansed of foreign words, or, to put it differently, whose vocabulary was split by the custodians of purity into two parts, only one of which was recognized as German proper. This movement began early in the nineteenth century when under the impression of the Napoleonic wars hostility to France encouraged opposition to the Verwelschung of the German language. Early leaders in this movement were writers, philosophers, lexicographers, and political activists, such as, Herder, Fichte, Campe, Arndt, and Fouqué.

Since then opposition to foreign words has never entirely ceased. Its intensity grew markedly at times of nationalism, for instance after the Prussio-French war of 1870/71 or during World War I (cf. von Polenz 1972). The focus was on French and English loan words, but what was recognized as foreign was determined by the respective purist's knowledge and resourcefulness. Many words of which most innocent citizens would never have suspected an un-German origin were unmasked and black-listed, such as, Karotte, Paket, Papa, Insekt, Kilo, to name just a few household words.[13]

Had the advice of the purifiers been followed more scrupulously, German would surely be a much purer language, but one that could hardly cope with the demands of modern communication. Obviously, a book like Zur Kritik der politischen Ökonomie could never have been written without the subversive

words. Of the title only the two shortest words would survive a purifying revision. "So much the better for the German language and the German people," one might be tempted to paraphrase the purist's argument. However, politically the assessment of language purism is not so simple, that is to say, the political left was not always immune against it either.

Nor was Germany the only prominet case. The French have a glorious tradition in this regard, and so have many others. The pejorative title of R. Etiemble's book Parlez-vous franglais? (Paris 1964) is only one of many, and it was only last year that L'Express published a long feature article Sait-on encore parler le français? Of Arabic an anxious observer reports:

> "The modern Arabic mind is becoming an offshoot of the modern Western mind and is retaining fewer and fewer of the rigidly Semitic thought habits....It may take no more than two or three generations for it to become a highly integrated member of the Western cultural linguistic family, sharing fully in a common modern linguistic spirit" (Stetkevych 1970: 119, 122).

Only because Arabic has recently incorporated many Western loan words into its vocabulary.

Language purity is often seen as a value of and by itself, but it is also credited with remarkable power. In considering the problems of language modernization in some Southeast-Asian countries, del Rosario argues against lexical borrowing from Western languages on the grounds that

> "...consistent and intelligent modernization of their national languages would enable the Malaysians, the Indonesians and the Filipinos to overtake and eventually surpass in science and technology the Western nations, whose national languages are burdened with large numbers of terms derived from Latin and Greek, combining forms which are no

> longer consistent with the home and community languages spoken by their children. Japan, with her consistent Nippongo, is demonstrating that this can be done" (del Rosario 1968: 16).

Maybe the Europeans and Americans, too, should take this to heart, but it is hard to believe that this will be the unexpected solution to their trade frictions with Japan. For one thing, whatever can be said about Nippongo, it certainly is one of the most corrupted languages of the world (cf. Sugito in this volume). Some 50% of the vocabulary is of Chinese origin or coined with Chinese origin morphemes, and since the Meiji-Restoration there has been a heavy influx of Western loan words. Since the end of World War II English loans have entered the language at a breathtaking rate. Yet, Japanese is a language with a unique identity that sets it apart from almost all other languages. Its genius is the ability to adapt and assimilate without losing its identity.

"La raison d'être, et de survivre, d'un langue, réside dans son mode original d'expression des faites sociaux humains," writes Massignon (1954: 15). There is some truth in this remark, however, this mode original d'expression has nothing to do with the purity of a language, as Japanese very clearly demonstrates, or English, for that matter.

The above ideas on the virtues of purity are fundamentally misguided because they are based on a faulty notion of what a language is. They are based on the assumption that a language is a nomenclature. Languages incorporate nomenclatures, but they are not nomenclatures. Even heavy lexical borrowing does not

necessarily affect a language's identity. Linguists have more sophisticated notions of what a language is, and this is another reason why they should not be silent in these matters.

While their ability to influence usage is, and should be, limited, they have the prerequisites to keep the purits' ideologically informed guidance in check. If they recognize that languages not only grow naturally, but are also made by their speakers, they may be less reluctant to voice their respective opinions about good language and bad language. In a world where technological innovation is rapid and rapidly trickles down to the non-specialist public, deliberate language cultivation is more necessary then ever.

Notes

1.The following statements from the prefaces of Lowth's grammar of English and Gottsched's grammar of German can be seen as typical of the prevailing view of the purpose of grammar in the Renaissance.

> "The principle design of a Grammar of any Language is to teach us to express ourselves with propriety in that Language; and to enable us to judge of every phrase and form of construction, whether it be right or not" (Lowth 1775: xi).
>
> "Eine Sprachkunst überhaupt is eine gegründete Anweisung, wie man die Sprache eines gewissen Volkes, nach der besten Mundart derselben, und nach der Einstimmung seiner besten Schriftsteller, richtig und zierlich, sowohl reden, als auch schreiben solle" (Gottsched 1748/1978: 37). [In general, a grammar is a well-founded prescription of how to speak and write the language of a given people correctly and elegantly, in accordance with its finest vernacular and the consensus of its best writers.]

2. Laymen usually think that linguistic change is bad. Linguists, nowadays, take a more distanced view refraining from evaluating language change. Again, this is a very modern view. In former times it was common not only to regard some languages as better, richer, more refined, more rigid, etc. than others, but also to look at language change in qualitative terms.

Leibniz was worried about the impoverishment of German and wrote his famous "Admonition to the Germans" (1683). At roughly the same time, the Royal Society in London appointed a committee "for improving the English language." In 1712 Swift published a "Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Tongue." Renaissance grammarians often stated as their explicit goal to make their language as good as others, especially Greek, Latin, and Hebrew.

3. This attitude is exemplified in a typical way by the following statement:

> "It all boils down, really, to a question of acceptability in certain classes of our society, in those classes which are socially dominant and which set the tone for others. Whether a form is accepted or rejected does not depend on its inherent merit...'Correct' can only mean 'socially acceptable,' and apart from this has no meaning as applied to language" (Hall 1950).

This is a very radical position, as it denies the possibility of the 'inherent merit' of a linguistic form, that is, for instance,

its systematic coherence. For a long time, however, structuralist linguists thought there was no other solution to the problem of linguistic correctness.

4. Cf. the section Natural versus artificial in the introductory chapter.

5. For a more thorough account of language and nationalism cf. Coulmas 1985, chapter II.

6. "That nations more happily endowed and under more favorable conditions should possess more excellent languages than others is grounded in the very nature of things."

7. A good example is Miller's explicit remark: "There are no such things as an inadequate or a false and treacherous language" (1982: 104) which he made in criticising "irrational" arguments of Japanese linguists about the shortcomings of their language.

8. For a more detailed account of Leibniz' role in the history of German language adaptation cf. the introductory chapter.

9. "Just as one would have expected, we experience the worst insufficiency in words referring to morality, passion of the mind, social intercourse, governmental matters, and all sorts of affairs of civil and public life."

10. Kanbun is the earliest form of written Japanese which evolved from applying the Chinese script to the Japanese language, a tradition that originated in the sixth century A. D. and continued until the nineteenth century.

Notice, for instance, what Nishi Amane, a leading intellectual of the Meiji period, remarked about Japanese as late as 1874:

> "In our letters at present, however, it is improper for us to write as we speak as well as improper to speak as we write since the grammar of speech and writing in our language are different" (Nishi 1874/1976: 5).

11. In former times, there was no question about this. The German Grammarian Gottsched, for instance, was very explicit in this regard.

> "Before the invention of letters, all languages of the world were rugged and unshapely. Their first proper form they owe to writing" (Gottsched 1748, III#22).

One need not subscribe to such a blunt statement in order to recognize the importance of writing for language cultivation.

12. The delusion of authenticity and linguistic purity seems to become a public issue either as a reaction to excessive borrowing or in conjunction with a nationalist movement. It is thus a

recurrent theme of sociolinguistic history. In 1561 Sir John Cheke wrote about English:

> "Our language should be written clean and pure, unmixed and unmangled with borrowing of other tongues, wherein if we take no heed by time, ever borrowing and never paying, she shall be fain to keep her house as bankrupt" (quoted from Moore 1910: 5).

Cheke, for one, should have been aware of the difficulty of fulfilling his request, as he was a professor of Classics at Cambridge. Yet, unmixed is hardly unmixed and pure not pure in his sense.

The German poet Klopstock, in his polemical treatise Die deutsche Gelehrtenrepublik, brands as treason and "contrary to the nature and the good old customs of our language" to "mix foreign words in the language without need" (1774/1975: 25). His exasperation was understandable, however, because the German language was still held in little respect by the social élites. What Voltaire wrote home from Potsdam in 1750 testifies to its inferior status: "L´allemand est pour les soldates et pour les chevaux."

13. The following is a list of some arbitrarily selected foreign words with their suggested German replacements from Eduard Engel´s (1918) Verdeutschungswörterbuch [Germanification dictionary]. Many of the German substitutes have a humorous effect, testifying to the author´s courage as much as to the misguidedness of his proposals.

loan word	proposed alternative
Karriere	Dienstlauf, Stufenleiter
Karikatur	Verzerrung
Kapital	Vermögen, Hauptgut
kapieren	begreifen
Karotte	Möhre
Installation	Einrichtung, Leitlegung
Ingenieur	Werkherr, Oberwerker
immanent	einhaftend
transzendent	überirdisch, jenseitig
Triangel	Dreieck
Epigone	Nachkomme
Enfant terrible	Hecht im Karpfenteich
Energie	Kraft
Echo	Rückschall
Duell	Ehrenhandel
Diplomat	Staatsmann
dionysisch	edelrauschig
demonstrativ	außenwirksam
Baby	Kleinchen

alphabetisch	abecelich
Ultimatum	letztes Wort
Zynismus	Schamlosigkeit

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